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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/PPD, NEA/ELA, INR/NESA, IIP, PA, ECA; BEIRUT FOR
SISSON, GRANT, LENZEN

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SUBJECT: DAMASCUS MEDIA REACTION, OCTOBER 30, 2008

News Summary

¶11. The media storm surrounding the October 26 attack in Abu Kamal and subsequent Syrian accusations against the United States and Syrian actions against U.S. Embassy operations in Damascus continued unabated. Print media were dominated by reports of a large protest march in the town of Abu Kamal on October 29. A large (estimated 10-15,000 persons) October 30 demonstration in downtown Damascus received a blitz of images and interviews on Syrian TV and all local and regional media outlets. One television talk show featured the Venezuelan Ambassador to Syria, who condemned the attack and the United States and expressed his solidarity with Syria.

¶12. Government paper Al-Thawrah dedicated a full page to condemnations of the Abu Kamal attack and of the United States. Authors included governments, individuals, and organizations, including Iran, a Belgian politician, the Conference of Arab Renaissance, a Czech political party, the Greek Communist Party, the Syrian Community Petersburg, the PLO, Lebanese Civil Society, the Arab Lawyers Union, the Arab Doctors Union, the Arab Democratic Union, the Ba'ath Party in Yemen, and American Congressman Dennis Kucinich.

¶13. All papers on October 30 featured banner headlines on the Syrian government's demand for the U.S. Embassy to close both the American Cultural Center and the Damascus Community School (known locally as the American School).

¶14. Key Headlines

-- "Huge Protest March in Abu Kamal ... Condemnation of the Aggression Continues ... Characterized as 'Uncivilized' and 'State Terrorism'" (Al-Thawra, SARG-owned daily)

-- "American Congressman Kucinich: 'Not Acceptable and Not Reasonable'" (Al-Thawra)

-- "Tehran: 'American Aggression is a New Gamble to Rattle World Peace'" (Al-Ba'ath, SARG-owned daily)

-- "Yemeni Politician (Barkani) to Al-Ba'ath: 'The Arabs are Being Targeted and Everyone is Betting on Syria'" (Al-Ba'ath)

-- "Foreign Ministry Informs the American Charge d'Affaires of the Cabinet's Decision to Close the Cultural Center and the American School" (Tishreen, SARG-owned daily)

Key Editorials

¶15. "When the American Administration Directs Terrorism" (Tishreen)
"The excessive joy which appeared on Presidential candidate John McCain's [face] following the aggression his administration launched shows that it was planned and studied and that the decision was taken at the highest levels...This means that Bush...wanted to

distract attention from some of the internal crises of his Republican Party and demonstrate that his administration is still capable of taking decisions that concern the war on Iraq and therefore to lie again to the Americans and tell them that he has achieved a military victory...We have to point out that the inhabitants of the farm and the workers in the building that was targeted, eight of whom were martyred, were all unarmed, and the American soldiers who carried out the aggression knew that... What is more dangerous than (Bush's lies) is that Bush and his team have become an administration of terrorist operations and war crimes...."

¶6. "American Policy - From Stupidity to Madness" (Al-Ba'ath)

"The project of hegemony which the current American Administration has adopted expresses the philosophy of the controlling classes, and it now reflects a way of compensating for the economic weakness through which America is passing... In a new adventure, Washington carried out a new aggression by striking a civilian place in Syria, in which there were children, women, elderly men, and workers, with the excuse that it was a center of terrorism. The hypocrisy of this administration is not surprising... because it destroyed an entire country, destroyed its civilization, and killed its children under the pretext of the existence of weapons of mass destruction."

CONNELLY